



eContrails



ISSUE 213

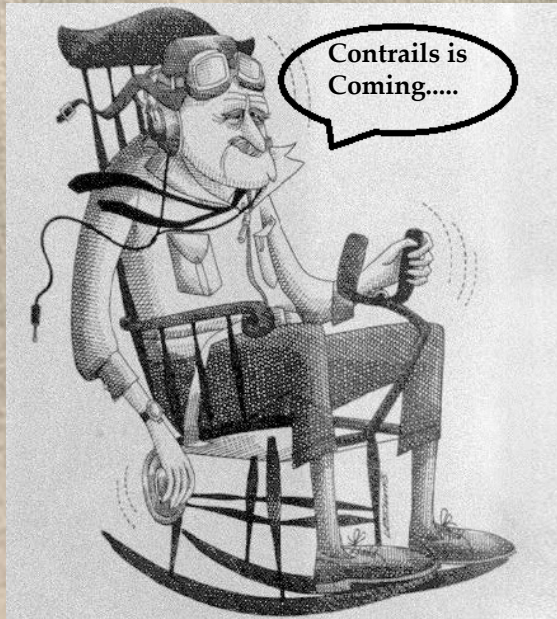
FEBRUARY 2021

*Like the sands of the hourglass,
So are the days of our lives.....*

Socrates

*And so are the days of eContrails.....
This is the last edition.....but wait.....
Gary is back and so a coffee table
bound final edition of Contrails
will be sent outshortly*

Gary Ferguson after working on Contrails.....



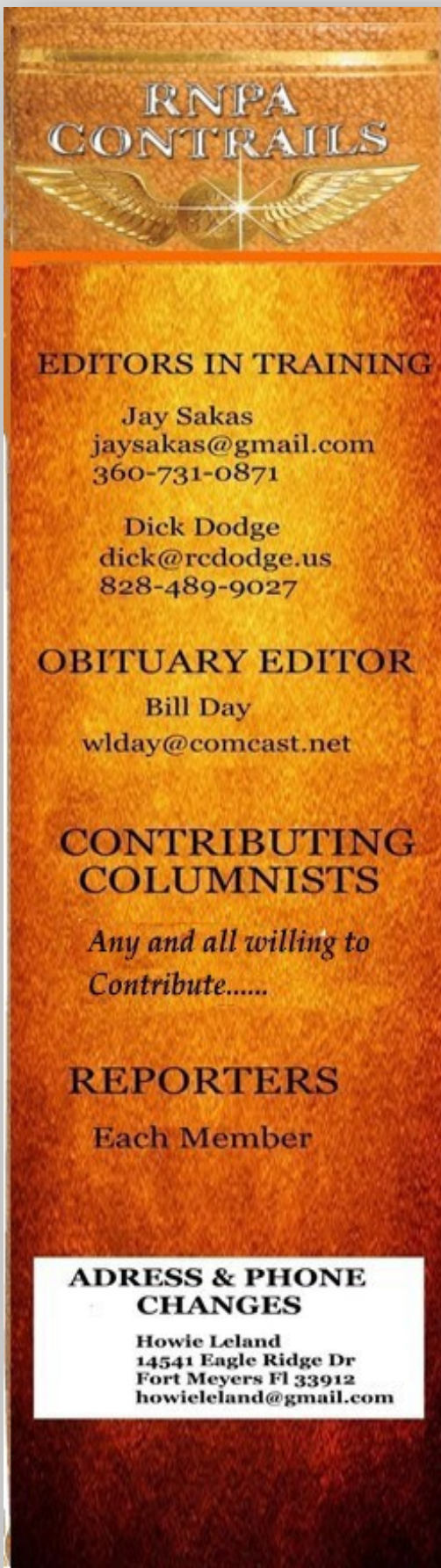
*To be sure you get the last
edition.....*

*Contact Howie Leland to
make sure your address is
correct in the Master list*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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The cover of the e-Contrails magazine features a textured, orange-to-brown gradient background. At the top, the title "RNPA CONTRAILS" is written in a serif font, with a golden eagle logo below it. The cover lists various roles and names, including editors, an obituary editor, contributing columnists, and reporters. A white box at the bottom contains contact information for address and phone changes.

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NOTAMS

The Future of RNPA Obituaries

RNPA members are entitled to a pilot specific obituary. This wonderful final issue of Contrails may raise a question about the future posting of these obituaries. If there is a RNPA.org website someone will be posting death notices and obituaries. Death notices will be posted for all NWA pilots, whether they are RNPA members.

Some members have sent me obituaries for posting at the time of their death. This is a wonderful way of having the last word. If you read of the death of a NWA pilots in a newspaper, or other publication, and if we have not released a death notice, please let me or Dick Dodge know. This can assist in confirming a reported death.

A special thanks to Gary Ferguson and Jay Sakas for providing a wonderful format for communicating and posting these valuable messages.

(- Bill Day)

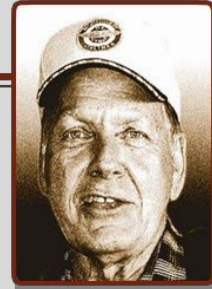
Dear Fellow RNPA Members and NWA Pilots,

With the phasing out of our wonderful Contrails Magazine, I intend to continue to post the passing of our fellow pilots in the Memoriam page of our website as long as I am able and as long as we still have the website up and running. The web site is a viable way for all of us to stay connected.

My thanks to Gary and Jay for the wonderful job that they have done through the years in producing the Magazine.

Sincerely, Dick Dodge

President Reports

*Gary Pisel*

Fellow Members of RNPA

I hope this finds you all in GOOD HEALTH and avoiding the pandemic virus. Barbara and I have had our second dose on 4 February, now we can travel except there are very few places we can go. Hopefully, all of this will pass during this year of 2021.

We had to cancel our RNPA Cruise to the Caribbean because of COVID. Decisions need to be made as to a reinstatement or to just forget it. If you have ideas or suggestions please contact me. One of the goals of the NCL cruise was to keep all the costs as near to a normal reunion as possible. There are longer cruises from the West coast but the cost rises rapidly. The only short 3-5 day cruises leave out of Long Beach and go to Catalina, Ensanada Mexico and return. They spend most of the cruise time going in circles.

Plans for the summer cruise on the St Croix are being formulated. It appears the event will take place later in the summer or early fall. Thus, giving the pandemic more time to fade out and more herd immunity to take place.

The airline business has certainly changed in the past year.

Airlines are struggling to keep in business. Routes are being drastically changed. Within each airline there are major changes taking place concerning equipment. No longer do we have the 747 flying passengers, only cargo. One airline EMERATES, is only flying the Airbus 380 with a fleet of 35.

To be honest it feels good to be retired.

In closing I URGE EACH OF YOU TO GET THE VACCINE! We had no effects. Some do get a sore arm for a day or two, but nothing serious. By doing so we can visit each other, we can visit our relatives and friends without causing concern.





Trea\$urer'\$ Report: Howie **Leland**

Since we continue to have adequate reserve funds to meet our expenses there are no dues assessments for 2021. The board has voted to fund a final printed CONTRAILS plus an updated 2021 MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY. In order to receive these two publications, we need to have your current mailing address. An easy way to make sure we have your current address is to log into **RNPA.ORG**. Then under Welcome to RNPA there is a site, "**Click here to update your address**". Click on the site, fill out the form and submit it.

Also, you may email me: howieleland@gmail.com or call my cell 239-839-6198 with updates. We definitely want to stay in touch with everyone. _

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to RNPA.





Editor _____ Jay Sakas

Suggestions, always welcome.....



Fellow Readers.....

It is with heartfelt sadness, that I announce the last edition of eContraails. It seems only yesterday that three of us, Bill Day, Dick Dodge and myself, jumped into the fray of continuing Contraails. Gary Ferguson had decided to retire. We didn't have Gary's publishing, editing skills, so the electronic version, eContraails, was born. Amazing what can be done with google and the internet.

Unfortunately, Gary could not continue and yours truly became editor in training. Through eight issues, I have tried to keep the RNPA members entertained and informed. With the ninth issue, I have decided to move on. The Bucket list needs completion, and the sands of time are slowly running out.

All is not lost. Gary has volunteered to edit and produce the final issue of Contraails. It will be a paperbound edition "50 years of RNPA", which you can proudly display on the coffee table.

I hope to continue providing information and some entertainment in RNPA.ORG. The three amigos will update the site. We will slightly redesign it. Events, notams, in memoriam, stories, forum, and anything else we can think of will be available 24/7.

We hope eContrails has kept all of you informed and entertained and kept all of us in touch.

Email me at econtrailseditor@gmail.com with stories or notifications, or anything else you might wish.

Signing off.....Good night.....Bill Good night..... Dick

Good Night and Good Luck

(plagiarized closingsHuntley Brinkley....Edward R Morrow)

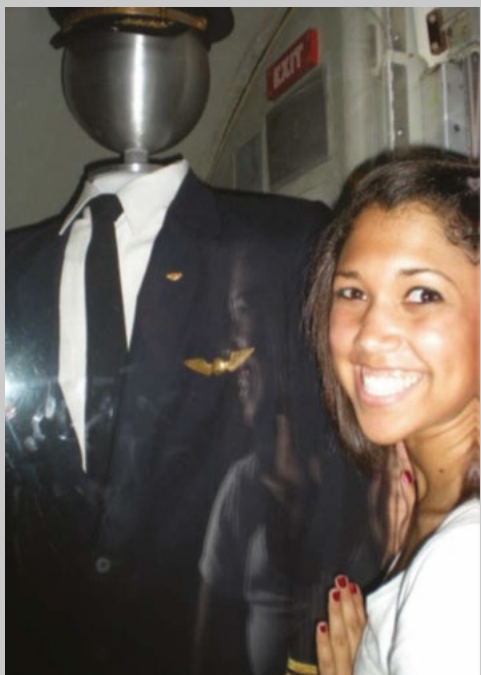
Sit back and enjoy the read..... editor, in retirement....J--

Notam....The final edition will include a directory...so update your info through Howie Leland.

Jay.... after working on eContrails.....



Smithsonian?



Really?

By Darrel Smith

1999

Glenda, my first and last wife, answered her phone. Mayan, our granddaughter, who was on a short visit to Washington DC, was on the line. Obviously excited, she was talking so fast it was difficult to understand what she was saying.

She was calling from the entrance to the cockpit area of a Northwest Airlines Boeing 747 that was part of a recently opened display of "America by Air" at the Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. "I found it! I found it! I am standing beside Gram Pa's uniform." The "dummy" in the display was outfitted with this "dummy's" uniform.

In the Airline industry most eastbound "long haul" flights depart in the late afternoon or early evening. This departure time, after passing through several time zones and hours of flying through the night, allows for an early morning arrival. Drowsy passengers, followed by an almost equally exhausted flight crew, stumble into the airport terminal.

Tommy Tucker, my trusted copilot, the second officer and I had just completed a normal layover in the company hotel near the Narita Airport in Japan. We had been delivered to the airport where we went about our normal preflight duties. Upon arriving at the aircraft, we found the cabin crew busy preparing the aircraft for the overnight flight. This huge Boeing 747 sat quietly while many workers hurriedly prepared it for yet another Pacific crossing. Takeoffs, departures, approaches, and landings were the fun parts of airline flying. The time between could become hours and hours of checking, logging and monotony.

Thank goodness the average captain's memory was relatively (maybe very) short. He could therefore be entertained by the jokes and stories of his fellow pilots even though he had heard them all only a week or so ago. Their offerings always seemed fresh, humorous, and interesting.

The start, taxi and takeoff had been normal. This old heavily loaded jet was very slow to climb to altitude. We nursed it to the initial cruising altitude. The last few thousand feet showing only a 100 to 200 feet per minute climb rate. We were now well out over the Pacific and everything settled into a comfortable (let's somehow get through the night) mode.

The last four and a half years I had served as the Chief Pilot for the 400 or so pilots based in Honolulu, Hawaii. This relatively small group formed what seemed to be a close bond. We frequently addressed each other by first names. Everyone knew that I was approaching my mandatory retirement age of 60 years.

Our old but trusty jet preformed perfectly as we rode the jet stream toward the Islands. There had been a period of silence. Tommy finally turned slowly toward me and asked, "What are you going to do with your uniform after you retire?"

Aroused from a period of extreme alertness, I replied that it would never be used again. He asked, “ Would you like to donate it to the Smithsonian?”

Tommy, from his college days, I think, was very good friends with the curator of the new display being developed for the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. Northwest Airlines had donated the very first Boeing 747 aircraft which, during its last years, had been flown regularly between Honolulu and Tokyo, to the Museum. It and its sister ships were dubbed “the beach product” and therefore rigged with many rather small seats to accommodate the Japanese body style. I had served as captain on several Pacific crossings on this very aircraft.

I told Tom that I would be happy to donate this old uniform to the cause. I had no clue as to how this was to be accomplished. He gave me a name and address which I somehow put in a place where I could later find it.

Upon retirement I gathered my entire uniform; hat, jacket, trousers, shirt, tie, belt, shoes, socks (no underwear) and sent the lot to the address that Tom had given me. I soon forgot the entire event. A few months later I received a form letter that, if signed, would relinquish any claim to the items that I had mailed. This document was quickly signed and returned.

Long story made short, my uniform was used in this new Smithsonian (America by Air) display. Our granddaughter had found it and was excited. I would like all my fellow pilots of Northwest Airlines to understand that I feel that there are numerous pilots who more richly deserve to have their uniforms in this display.

I do find it interesting that I wore that uniform to fly that aircraft across the Pacific a number of times. There are many, many pilots who have flown the Pacific and that aircraft much more than me. I feel that every pilot who flew this magnificent aircraft should be proud to have been part of the history of the Boeing 747.

Tommy, thank you for requesting that I donate my uniform, there is some pride knowing that I was an operational pilot on this aircraft and for the historic Northwest Airlines. As I write this little story, 15 years after retiring, I wonder if that old uniform is still on display.

Note: I have never viewed the display at the Smithsonian. Please know that I still love Northwest Airlines and consider it one of the best that ever existed. Every Northwest Pilot should be proud that we were part of one of the world's best! It was a sad day when it disappeared!



Car Smashing Story

By Vern Eglit

I was a SO on the DC-10 when we were taxiing out for take off in Newark. Ground control calls to tell us they noticed a door was open. I did not see any lights on the panel indicating an open door. We pulled over to wait for our maintenance personnel to verify all doors were closed. After waiting for several minutes a man comes to the front of the A/C and gives us a thumbs up. All of us being military trained then assumed all was OK and proceeded to finish the taxi list and pre-take off check lists. We called ground and asked for clearance for taxi and take off position. We started to taxi when we noticed it took a little more power than usual to move. All of a sudden a man ran in front frantically waving his hands for us to stop. At that point the Captain decided that we needed to see what was going on. We all got out via the E&E compartment and came upon an unbelievable scene.



Apparently the door that was open was the small door on the right front for ground personnel to talk with the pilots. The ground people - not our maintenance- had driven a car up to the A/C so they could climb onto the roof and latch the door closed. It was about this time that we started to taxi thinking the thumbs up signal was for "all clear".

Instead, he was "asking if all was clear for driving his car under the A/C".

So, the scene we saw was the two front tires of the right truck were smack in the middle of the sedan - crushed to the ground. We never felt the right side of the A/C lift up on the car.

This had been a brand new airport utility sedan with radios, lights, etc. that were never used to contact us. If I remember correctly the car only had about 900 miles on the odometer.

The C manual was soon changed and stated that a "thumbs up" hand signal did NOT mean OK.



Surprise Jump Seater

By Daniel Lindsey

It was sometime in the early 70's, and certainly prior to July 8th. (I don't think I have to remind you of what happened on that day. Talk about a long layoff!)

I was a S/O on the B720/320. It was the last leg of a 3 day trip, GEG-MSP. The Captain says to the F/O, "Why don't we give Dan a leg?". The F/O says "Sure". If they had only known who was going to climb the airstairs at the end of the finger at GEG!

We swapped seats and performed the checklists. While waiting for the agent to close us up, who walks out of the terminal and onto the ramp but Chick Hart, the FAA examiner for Northwest's 720/320 fleet. Up the stairs he comes and into the cockpit. Definitely an "O.S." moment.

He stows his stuff and proceeds to the back to meet the Flight Attendants. I think we called them "girls" back then, and they liked it!

After he left the cockpit (Flight Deck in today's vernacular) the Captain said "I'll fly this leg". What a relief for me, the only stick time for me being on the 727. But not for the F/O who had come from the Electra and had never been a S/O on anything. Another "O.S." moment.

Upon Chick Hart's return, the Captain did an exemplary job of keeping him focused on the front and not on the S/O's panel.

After reaching cruise he goes to the back to start beating up on the "girls". The Captain says, "Damn, we might just pull this off".

As I like to say, "Better to be lucky than good", and lucky we were. We pulled it off!



The Barrel Roll

By Fred Pack

What would happen to a pilot and co-pilot if, during a commercial flight, they decided to barrel roll the plane? After they put up the fasten seatbelt sign of course.

True..flight recorder pulled in Tokyo for severe turbulence inspection. Boeing 707-320 enroute from Seattle to Tokyo. Area: King Salmon, Alaska. Initial altitude, FL350. I am the copilot, but an aircraft commander in the USMC Reserves.

We hit a mountain wave which had never been known to exist in that area. Temperature changes of PLUS/MINUS 20°C in 5 seconds. This is causing 20 knot changes of indicated airspeed. Altitudes between 33 and 37,000 just trying to keep flying. I'm flying with the autopilot in manual running pitch changes...needless to say...altitude hold OFF. Captain is running the power. (Flight idle to METO power)

The shear was so sharp, that at one point...it hit one wing.. and not the other...tipped us over about 110° to the right ON THE AUTOPILOT. I kicked off the autopilot and continued the momentum/roll back to wings level.

Nothing floated up off the floor, so I know I maintained positive "G". Second Officer, behind me, didn't realize we had rolled. No passengers or cabin crew noticed as we were bouncing all over the sky anyway.



WE were in that mess for over 20 minutes. Couldn't go back to Anchorage and go through that again.

Our bird was inspected at Haneda.....No damage...nobody hurt..recorder showed a positive 2.5 and no negative "G" but Zero "G".

I have a recording of my transmission to Anchorage Radio when we finally got out of it:

"DON'T LET ANY OTHER G++ DAMN FOOL THROUGH THIS AREA!"

I wrote this up in Quora sometime back...Vint Hansen was the Captain. I can't recall who the second officer was.

I was able to relay winds and temperatures that occurred. Danny Sowa, our weather guru, was able to positively confirm a mountain wave. There were no known prior instances recorded.

The flight recorder showed us on the limits of positive and negative "G" for over twenty minutes.

Turbulence inspection at Haneda showed NO structural damage to the plane. No popped rivets.....nothing. Not one injury to passengers or crew.

Voices from the Cockpit

Captain [looking back at Second Officer—seat back, feet up, eyes closed.]

"The Company is NOT paying you to sleep . . . !"

Second Officer opening one eye: "Are you kidding me?"

I've been doing this for over two years—and haven't missed a paycheck yet."

The Case of the INOP INS

By B.J. Molé

Back in the mid 80s I was flying as F/O on the 747 out of SEA. One such trip was a pax flight to NRT. The Captain was Lou Driggers, S/O was a trainee with an instructor. I wouldn't swear to it but I'm 'thinkin' it was Gar Bensen.

We were just getting settled in the cockpit when the mech sticks his head in the door and says: "I swapped #x INS so you now have good INS in position 1 & 2."

To which the Captain says, "Okay so when you get the 3rd INS we'll be ready to go." This was met with a surprise look from the mech, The mech then says: "We don't stock any INSS here!"

I'm thinking to myself, this is a major international gateway from the west coast. Where the hell do they stock then, Billings, Bozman, Mossula?



The mech retreats and disappears. A few minutes later this little 3 piece suit with no ID present "asswipe" comes up the spiral. Now, the S/O instructor was standing filling the doorway. Instead of saying 'excuse me' the shit says to the S/O instructor; "out of the way!" The instructor tells him, "I will

as soon as you show me your ID." The 'a**wipe pulls out and shows his ID.

So now the little shit is in the cockpit, already his tail feathers singed, and, instead of the normal formalities he says to the Captain; "Captain, what is your name?" to which Lou says, "I'll tell you that as soon as I read this to you." Lou had the MEL (I believe) and read 'when in the opinion of the captain, this flight can be conducted safely' and 'my name is Lou Driggers. The a**wipe disappears for about 3 minutes, returns and says to Lou; Captain would you mind coming to the phone. {remember, no cell phones then so he had to use the phone in the office}.

Lou identifies himself. It was the Chief-chief pilot, The conversation goes something like this.

CP, "Damn it, Lou, do I have to order you to fly?"

Lou in his calm inimitable voice says: "Well, you can have me replaced but you can't order me to fly!"

I can picture that just blew the Chief pilot in MSP right through the overhead! CP says, "standby".

While Lou is on hold, the mech sticks his head in the office door and says: we got the 3rd INS installed, its spinning up and you'll be ready to go in a few minutes! CP finally gets back on the phone and Lou says:

"We got the 3rd INS in and, right now you're delaying us from departing! (that was the nail in the coffin.)

We took off a little late, BFD. Smooth trip. On the return to SEA several days later we get a message from the SEA chief pilot: SEE ME! I suggested to Lou to just go home and sleep on it. He didn't.

The bidding for the following month was already completed for Lou before we left so, when the chief pilot gave him 3 days off it really screwed up his next month. The irony was that he got the punishment for INSURORDINATION! Now Lou was an incredibly quiet, polite Marine and he was never insubordinate. I told him to grieve it which, fortunately, he did.

Between the incident and the grievance hearing there came a few things.

1. The company sent out a letter saying something to the effect: If you ever error, error on the side of safety and we will be there to back you up. Signed by all the execs.

2. In one of the triannual bulletins there was a section why one shouldn't leave intercontinental without 3 INSs because, with only 2, if another were to go out of control, you're screwed because you won't know which one to follow! It would be a coin toss. The company shot itself in the foot!!!

On the last weeks before his retirement, I called Lou to make sure he got his money from the grievance. He did!



Last Flight

*"Take the long way home."
Supertramp*

By John Robertson

My flying career came to a screeching halt when, after a botched lab reading and several unreturned phone calls from a doctor, I would not trust with a flu shot, I was given the news, "The results came back positive." After starting the day some 20 hours earlier in Tokyo, I got the call while on a layover in downtown Minneapolis. This medical journey had started a few months earlier in Hibbing, Minnesota, when my family practitioner recommended a biopsy of my prostate. While still in the normal range, my PSA numbers showed enough of a jump over the previous year to warrant a closer look. Considering Dad's battle with the disease and subsequent spreading of the cancer to his spine, I readily signed off on the biopsy.

When I showed up at the Urologist's office, his nurse welcomed me and administered a couple of "chill" pills to relax and help calm me during the procedure. "And what exactly is the procedure?" I asked. She showed me the stirrups where I'd place my feet and the spring-loaded probe. "Okay, so glad I asked."

I was the first patient of the day and could not understand why the doctor was 20 minutes late and counting. Was he reviewing my records? Calling my GP to gather more information? My guesses were well off the mark. When he finally entered, he said, "So you're back for another biopsy? And what did we find on the first one?"

The nurse looked at me in disbelief. Before I could muster any words, (maybe the calming pills were kicking in) she explained how this was my initial visit.

"Oh, must have mixed you up with someone else." Ya think?

When he asked, "What were your PSA readings?" my disdain for this character grew. He had no clue who I was and had never read my charts. Mentally, I imagined gathering the gumption to swing my feet out of the stirrups, throw the paper robe on the floor, and say, "You're fired!" while walking out the door.

But I did not do any of that. Instead, I just told myself to stay put and get this over with.

The first shot with the spring-loaded slicer and dicer got my attention. "Yikes!" During the remaining snips, I had a death grip on the bed's sides. In between jolts, he asked me how I was able to get time off in the middle of the week. Through tears, I muttered how a pilot's schedule changed monthly.

"Oh, a pilot, huh? Then you must know Bob Smith. He was in last week with a PSA reading off the charts."

"Sorry, don't know him." And sorry to hear your abuse of patient/doctor confidentiality. . He took another sample. "Yeow!"

“How ‘bout Fred Jones? After treating his prostate cancer, he had incontinence issues.”

I shook my head, one direction for the pain and the other for the unprofessionalism coming out of this ass-clown’s mouth.

“That should do it. Best of luck,” were the last words I heard while he scampered out of the room.

With assistance from the nurse, I tidied up. My body language and the scorn on my face let her know how I felt about the doctor. To her credit, she did not badmouth the guy, but I sensed she knew he was a bad apple who should not have been practicing.

Over the next few days, I experienced some unnerving side effects from the procedure. Via a phone call, the nurse told me it was to be expected, and would eventually clear. Funny how the doctor failed to discuss what to expect post-op. I was told the biopsy results would be available after five business days. When that day arrived, there was no phone call. I assured Renee, “Let’s give it a couple more days.”

On day eight, I lost my patience and called the uro-doc’s office.

“The lab that the doctor used erred with the slide readings, so he’s sent them to another lab.”

“How did they err?”

“Sorry, I don’t know.”

“And how long do you suppose the good doctor was going to leave me hanging for the results?”

“I don’t know that either.”

“I understand why you don’t know how the lab goofed, and I think you know why the doctor didn’t call. I can’t be the only patient with questions

about this guy.” (Not surprisingly, within the year this quack's picture was featured on the front page of the Duluth newspaper. He'd been reprimanded by the medical board for performing unwarranted procedures.)

There was a pregnant pause on the other end. She regrouped and told me to expect the results in another five days.

It was not exactly a surprise when the results came back positive. With knowledge of Dad's history, years earlier the GP told me how the chances of the same cancer rearing its ugly head increased exponentially. I paced that hotel room while trying to gather my thoughts. A call to Renee brought comforting words. She was supportive and said, “Together, we'll beat this.” Temporarily, at least, she took me out of my funk.

My next call went to NWA's assigned ALPA lawyer. After explaining my condition, I asked, “Can I fly the return leg to Tokyo tomorrow?”

She replied, “Sorry to hear about your cancer. It's a grounding event, but once treated and you satisfy the FAA medical department, you'll be returned to flying status.”

That news required one more call. I reached NWA scheduling and said, “I won't be working tomorrow's flight. Please place me on long-term sick status. Paperwork to follow.”

The drive north from the Twin Cities to our home on the Iron Range normally took around three hours. But that day, I was in search of a new path. With the diagnosis making what seemed like uninterrupted appearances in my thought process, any distraction—like finding a hidden valley or even getting lost—would temporarily take me to a better place.



THE TOWN BUILT OF WOOD.

An hour north of the cities, I reached Hinkley, where I exited the highway and passed a museum that told the story of an 1894 runaway fire. When the hardwoods were felled and timber was the number one crop, the lumbermen left piles of branches and stumps in their wake as they cut through the woods. Three months of drought conditions, coupled with a stiff breeze, resulted in a firestorm that killed over 400 people. A turn to the east took me across tracks that played a role in saving hundreds of lives. As the flames drew near, train engineers waited until the last minute, filling their cars with frantic folks, before chugging their way through smoke and sparks to safety.

Leaving the pavement, a dirt road with no traffic gave me a chance to park. I closed my eyes and tried to picture the wall of fire and feel its heat. I heard the screams above the approaching killer's rumble. Not the prettiest picture, but still a distraction.

This land in central Minnesota was sparsely populated. Occasional farmhouses popped up alongside a mostly straight road. Some had tidy yards and freshly painted outbuildings; others were ramshackled and weathered with rusting cars, washing machines, and discarded toys planted haphazardly throughout the weed-patched yard. No matter the shape, size, and shoddiness of the abode in the middle of nowhere, I asked myself, *Who lives here, and how do they earn their keep?*

The road ran to a "T" on the east shore of circular-shaped Mille Lacs. The lake was a must-stop for Walleye lovers, until their numbers dropped due to a combination of tourist over-fishing and netting by the Ojibwe tribe.

Northbound took me to the Mississippi river, and unless in a canoe, its snake-like course was difficult to follow. With little car traffic, the bridges were infrequent, and often the road leading to the river's edge gave me no place to go but back. Before turning around, I imagined islands of red and white pines floating downriver, propelled by the mighty Miss, on their way to the paper mills.

Our home in Coleraine overlooked Trout Lake, a 2,000-acre body of water located on the western end of the Iron Range, the country's major iron ore district. At one time, nearly all of Trout's shoreline was owned by U.S. Steel. The company had built a washing plant designed to reduce silica from the ore, and for over 60 years, the waste product was dumped into the lake. Several decades later, the waters had cleared and the poplar trees along its shoreline fluttered in concert with the wind's gusts.

This drive home had taken a good while longer than normal. New paths were discovered, and it shifted my focus away from impending health issues. Once through the front door, I was greeted with hugs and words of encouragement.

As Renee and I discussed what came next and when, I noticed an unopened box.

"What's that?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. It got here just before you arrived."

The box contained a Delta pilot's uniform. The fitting had taken place a few weeks earlier, prior to the biopsy news.

Renee said to try it on, but I declined. If my flying career was ending, I wanted to go out wearing the NWA uniform, with the U.S. Airmail wings pinned across my chest.

John Robertson at his best.....



The World According to Gar.....

Why am I a pilot and not a doctor.....

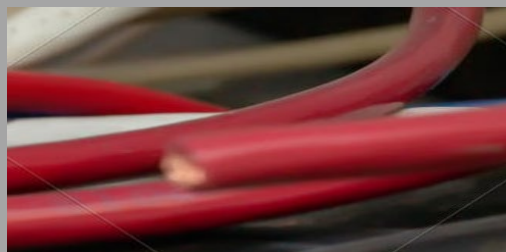
When young, I decided to go to Medical School .

At the entrance exam we were asked to arrange the letters NPEIS and form the name of an important body part which is most useful when erect.

Those who said spine are doctors today.

The rest of us went to flight school.

The WIRE



Well, I'm certainly no master mechanic but I had to fix a DC-4 or get stuck in Grand Forks, ND in 1959. I had just recently been hired by Northwest Airlines and am in my probationary first year. As a super junior copilot, I got stuck with the least desirable flying...Minneapolis to Fargo, to Grand Forks, to Winnipeg arriving about midnight. Crack of dawn, milk run back to Minnie. We had landed in Grand Forks on an icy runway with propellers that did not reverse. Why the engines had no reverse has importance will become apparent.

We offload a few peeps and board a few. Captain and I start our cockpit procedures. Hit the starter for #2 engine (left onboard engine) and nothing happens. We check the circuit breakers and try again..nothing....zip nada.

Grand Forks had a total of ONE agent and no mechanics. It's late, late evening. We had a procedure where we could race down the runway on three engines and hopefully get enough air to turn over the bad engine. Oops, remember the ice.. That idea is out.

OK, I did not want stranded out in the middle of nowhere so I asked my boss if I could take a look. The agent was able to come up with a pair of pliers and a screwdriver...YAY, master mechanic tools. I pop open the cowling and have a look.....A thick red wire (must be a hot wire??) is just hanging down disconnected from something. I see where it had been connected, grab it with pliers, hold it against the broken post and yell to the boss to give it a

try...WHEE...ENGINE CRANKS, starts. I was slowly turning into an icicle before, but now have a prop spinning VERY, VERY, close by. I get the cowl closed and locked...get on...strap in and off we go to Winnipeg. Best part of the trip, the sweet rolls at the airport to take back home... See, every flight has something good about it.

Fred Pack

Pack's Peak Stables

Wilkeson, WA

The World According to Gar.....

What is the worst thing that can happen when you are flying? - running out of airspeed, altitude, and ideas all at the same time.

You cannot fly unless you can land, but you cannot land unless you can fly. So, which is it?



I was 14 when I wanted to be a pilot. I'm now 80 and still want to be a pilot, but I'd rather be 14 again.

Flying is the art of learning to throw yourself at the ground and miss.

God does not subtract from man's allotted time the hours spent while flying, but He exacts harsh penalties for those who do not learn to land properly.

Beer was invented to make pilot stories more interesting.

The "Cat"

By Cliff Howell

To set the stage, this is a true story and accurate to every word as far as I remember. The words and language were in common use then but may not be PC now. I was SEA 707 F/O so the time frame was 1969-1973.

The 320B/C was a ground loving truck that a very few (including me) were big/strong enough to fly with one hand. Captain was John Paquet, F/O Cliff Howell, S/O was MIA during most of the action. I don't remember his name but after reading this he may confess.

Several other crews observed act three in Haneda.

The flight numbers were ichi-hachi, commonly called 'The Taipei for Lunch Bunch'. Good practice since the legs were HND-OSA-AHA-TPE-AHA-OSA-HND, but a little warm in summer since the A/C on that pig was marginal.



Flight 8. The baggage smashers in AHA had (accidentally I assume since Asians in that era couldn't afford pets) loaded a cat between two dogs. I believe that it was only the forward baggage compartment that had extra heat and A/C. The dogs involved were either Doberman and a German Shepherd or two German Shepherds. The cat was listed as a Burmese Mountain Cat but it looked like a cross between a cougar and a bobcat. I estimate its weight was 40-50 pounds and it was ALL muscle.

Its owners were a US military family. I cannot imagine having a family pet like that, but they certainly didn't have to worry about burglars or home invaders. THE cat didn't like being between two dogs so it simply destroyed its crate (I believe they were mostly wood in that era) and was loose in the compartment.


Act 1. OSA . The baggage smashers open the compartment and discover this loose cat. The dog by then were huddled in their crates and whimpering. The smashers were very good guys who then worked for JAS, not directly for NWA. They were short, stout, and very brave. They attempted to corral this creature.

Act 2. Smashers come to cockpit leaking enough blood to need 20+ stiches, including one with thumb almost bitten off. They declare "C AAH T get loose. C AAH T very angry." At this point John tells them to get medical attention and he will take care of the little pussy.

For those of you who didn't know John or his best friend/ co-conspirator 'Red' McGinnis, they had already done many things that 'earned' them the purple heart, the gold medal, and both had avoided arrest for some of them. Great guys to fly with.

John salvages a leftover passenger meal drum stick and I tell him I don't need a DSO (Dammed Silly Officer) and will man the cockpit and for him to please lock the door behind him.

John returns shortly telling the story that he carefully approached the cat

holding the drumstick  out in front and saying soothing words. The next thing he hears is the drumstick bouncing off the compartment wall without seeing the paw move. At this point he carefully backs out, announcing "Damn the bags and cargo. Shut the door. We are going to Haneda."

Leg to HND is uneventful except constant radio contact with TYO dispatch trying to explain the situation. Other flights heard the situation and added their own catcalls. One call by someone I will not identify was "Wild Pussy On Airplane".

Act 3. We arrive safely at HND, bus gate with 4? NW planes parked Cheek to Jowl. Crews (probably the braver or more foolish members thereof) from several other flights and us converge to observe the impending disaster from an unsafe distance.

Nattily dressed official (probably the designated paper-pusher on field because of the time frame) arrives with his butterfly net.

He enters the hold and returns a VERY short time later with the barely recognizable remains of the net. He couldn't stand, maybe upchucked, and has become an instant 'round eye' (half dollar sized). I am certain that his was not a one Sapporo night; probably closer to a case.

After much sucking air, it is decided that the men on the bottom of the sorority list will corner, cover El Gato with a cargo net. You remember the type with 2" nylon webbing and a 8"? square openings. They succeed but the 'little' pussy is fast destroying the first net. These brave fellows get another net over it and at that point it is somewhat subdued. I think at that time the crew bus driver demanded that we depart for the terminal so I don't know the final outcome.

John and I did not get called for a 'chat' with Roman Justice so it must have been hushed up or he simply did not know WHAT to do.



I render this tale because, even though it has been told more than a few times in cockpit B.S. sessions to a select few, I thought it might entertain some of those others who really knew not the depth or scale of layoffs or varied "other" employments some of us endured.

Inside the Nyropian Gulag

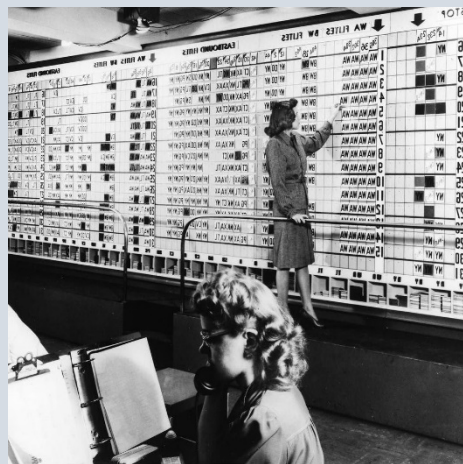
by Bob Higgins

It was the result of the "901 agreement" that a few dozen of us recently recalled pilots were again "on the street". Short story-- I went to see Randy at NWA employment stating I would smash bags, carry trays, wash planes, whatever... his answer was "can you type?" After showing him my balled up fists and assuring him I probably could, he agreed to put me in NWA reservations, right there at the GO.

I then started, one-on-one, with Ms. Harriet for two weeks of concentrated reservationist training. She, the Don-Nyrop-knows-everything-and-is-right person, and I, the why-the-hell-did-I-ever-come-to-NWA person, together every day, eight plus hours, including lunch. Finally, I matriculated to the res office, the very East end of the GO, for my 4-to-midnight shifts, me and about 60 or 75 women, all plugged into and answering ceaseless phone calls. "Good evening. Northwest Airlines. Mr. Higgins, May I help you please?"

If you ever inadvertently wandered into that res room, you might have wondered, after surveying the 6 or 7 very long rows of desks, what was the big board up on the back wall, with rows of light bulbs mostly lit, actually doing there. Surprise! Each one of those many lit bulbs was a phone call being held, and, the goal was to keep a large number of them lit, so that no res agent (like me) would sit idly at their desk waiting for another call.

That is called NWA max productivity.... and should the lit lights begin to seriously become unlit, i.e. a lack of incoming calls, it was time to think about letting an agent go home early (of course



The old way of reservations

saving NWA a few hours of pay.) ((You may remember interminable waits on calls to reservations back then))



There were other reservations offices, I think LA, New York, maybe others, as well as city sales offices all on the NWA phone/computer system. The fun part for me on the 4-to-mid shift, was that sometime later in the evening MSP res would start picking up calls from all over the country for those other offices that were then closed down. It was a riot...before answering the call, a recorded voice would say "Helena" or "Dubuque" or "San Antonio" or "Cleveland" etc.. I never knew where the next call would be from, having just booked a guy from Duluth to Atlanta... the next one might be an enraged passenger in L.A., or a drunk. I was supposed to "put myself "in the callers vicinity to allow them to feel they were talking with someone who knew their area. Hopscotching all over the USA on the phone was interesting, and occasionally challenging....think Nat King Cole, Route 66 - Omaha, Gallup New Mexico, Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino et al.

Reservations also handled calls from the airport, I think just MSP. People would call to have the PA announce where they were in the airport or they could not find where their little doggie was going to come in or where is the stadium the Twins play in or what time is it in Honolulu. Again a bit of a challenge, especially when they would heatedly say "I'm right next to the food counter" blissfully leaving off "you idiot".



So now, the crux of this aimless article, the There-I-Was story. It was a dark and stormy night, literally, snowing madly, roads becoming ugly etc. About 10PM, I got a call from the airport, this gentleman was somewhat distraught because his father

was at Mayo Clinic in Rochester and probably not going to survive much longer. His heavy accent finally became understandable when he says he had come all the way from Saudi Arabia to hopefully see his father one last time before the man dies. The problem for him was that all buses and transportation to RST from MSP was canceled... no taxis and he was not about to rent a car, never having seen snow before.

I tried to be consoling and also suggested some options such as a hotel stay on the 494 strip. But he was not sure how long Dad might last.

In a fleeting moment of inspiration, I asked him to stay on the phone, I would check something for him. I went up to my supervisor, who was a good guy, and suggested that I would go to the airport, pick the man up, and drive him to Mayo. The deal was he, the supe, would punch me out at 2AM, for two extra hours and let me leave right now.....in other words about three-plus hours non-productivity in exchange for a mercy mission and good feelings about NWA. Sold!

I got back on the phone, told my new friend how to get out to which door, and I would pick him up in ten minutes. Out the resv door and, oops, a fair amount of snow, maybe even a lot, had fallen. Anyway, I found my trusty old Volvo in the lot, cleared a path and away to the airport. There he was, standing inside the door in, I imagined, utter disbelief at what he was seeing outside the door. We met and as carefully and graciously as I could, explained that we will get there, but might be a bit of slow going.

Thankfully the roads were only bad, not real bad, and I had good tires for it.

We had a nice polite conversation for a bit and then past Hastings, about a third of the way, the road started being icy. I could tell was kind of tense, and I was not all that relaxed either.

Still progress was being made and there were no

other wanderers on the road. We were approaching Rochester and the roads were a bit better, except I performed a slide-by of the exit and had to back up a



he

way to get into the city. Streets were now reasonable, still icy, but I got him to Mayo front door about 2:30AM.

He was very, maybe extremely, thankful to me. I was guessing it was probably because he was glad, he was still alive.

Anyway, we bid farewell and I proceeded back to Hastings to my home. (I had earlier called my wife saying I might be later than normal). Got there about 5AM.

On the way to Mayo, we had casually exchanged names, so on the way back to Hastings I was thinking, maybe some real good could come out of this. Maybe a note to NWA about good service or a note to me somehow. I even thought if Dad was able to get himself all the way from Saudi Arabia to RST, he must have a few assets. Was it possible that I could inherit an oil well?

Well, you know the rest of the story. A long time later, many times, there I was at FL 350 somewhere over some place thinking.... "I wonder who that guy really was, and did he ever consider that I might really like to have an oil well?" 😊



And so, it goes."

Kurt Vonnegut

747-400 Electrical Smoke over Midway

By Wayne Anderson

Since RNPA Contrails magazine is hard up for stories I decided to try telling a story about an aviation incident that turned out okay in the end. One thing I kick myself for these days is not writing a journal about my flying experiences both while in the Air Force and with NWA, so be aware that this happened many years ago. I have a good memory it is just noticeably short these days. If there are inaccuracies, you can blame it on the fact that it happened a long time ago.



- 747-400 Overhead panel showing recirc fan switches.



The incident occurred sometime prior to June 2000 while I was the lead Captain on a 747-400 flying from NRT to HNL. It was 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and we were directly over Midway Island when I smelled electrical smoke and I had no idea where it was coming from. We were an augmented pilot crew with another Captain sitting in the right seat at the time, and the augmented co-pilot in the bunk room on his break. I thought I smelled smoke, and when I asked

the Captain (who on this flight was assigned as a co-pilot and was not the lead Captain), if he smelled smoke, he replied that on the ground he was a heavy smoker and had lost his sense of smell because of his smoking habit.

I had worked in the training department for several years and at the time of the incident, was a check pilot/instructor on the 747-400 and after months of training pilots at NATCO, had learned the systems on the -400 better than any airplane I had ever worked on. (As has been said – to learn a subject well teach it.) At the time of this incident there was not a complete emergency check list for electrical fire and smoke (or at least not an adequate one) and by memory I started turning off every fan I could think of that was not essential for flight.

Using the HF radio, I was able to connect with NWA maintenance control in MSP and after talking with the maintenance person on duty he confirmed my decision to turn off fan motors and as he detailed what he would turn off he also confirmed everything that I had already done. The smoke was bad enough that I had the oxygen mask out and used it occasionally, but I did not have to use it continuously which made it easier to communicate with the crew.

By this time, the lead flight attendant had entered the cockpit and I had her tell the augmenting co-pilot to come up to the cockpit. We had a full airplane with approximately 413 people on board and 17 flight attendants. Because it was the middle of the night most of the passengers were asleep. A couple more flight attendants came up to the cockpit and confirmed they too smelled smoke. The lead flight attendant, who coincidentally was married to an NWA pilot, said in her opinion it smelled like electrical wiring burning.

As we contemplated making an emergency landing at Midway Island, I started to believe that I must have turned off what had been causing the smoke because it seemed to me to be dissipating. But I wanted to be sure so I said to all the crew in the cockpit at that time that we would continue for 5 minutes and then I would ask for opinions as to whether anyone thought the smoke was getting worse or dissipating. After the first five minutes I felt that it was dissipating and when I asked the group in the cockpit for their opinion no one thought it was getting worse and everyone agreed the smell was dissipating.



I decided we would continue for another five minutes and if we decided the smoke was not dissipating, I planned on making an emergency landing at Midway. Midway was non-operational but I knew it had a functional runway that would accommodate a 747. However,

there was no approach available and no lighting on the runway. Although it was a moonlit night, and the island was visible from our altitude I knew it would be difficult not only because of no approach or runway lighting but also because there was no way to get the passengers off the airplane other than the emergency chutes once we had landed. Plus, once on the ground with all those passengers there would be no facilities for them or the crew. However, I felt it would have been better than having a fire on board or being forced to do an ocean landing.

Another five minutes went by and I was certain by then that the smoke had dissipated. And, again after a show of hands everyone agreed the smoke was not worse but seemed to have dissipated. To be certain I said we will go another five minutes and if everyone is certain at that time the smoke had dissipated, we would continue to Honolulu. After the next five minutes had passed, I again asked for a show of hands as to whether the smoke was worse or dissipated. There was a unanimous opinion that the smoke was gone. I then made the decision that we would continue to Honolulu which we did without further problems.

The next day I asked the maintenance personnel at the HNL base if they had found anything that had caused the electrical smoke. They told me that one of the overhead fans in the passenger compartment had burnt wires. Luckily, that is one of the first things that I had turned off.

Epilogue

The month after this incident happened, I had close friends (a husband and his wife) who were on Swissair Flight 111 from New York to Switzerland (a MD-11) that had an electrical fire in the overhead area in the cockpit. That airplane ended up crashing into the sea with everyone on board killed including my friends. The pilots on that flight ended up trying to trouble shoot the problem instead of immediately landing at the Nova Scotia airport which was 10 minutes away. Both Swiss Air pilots were experienced instructors on that aircraft and maybe would have saved the airplane and all on board had they immediately gone to the Nova Scotia airport. One of the things I remember when reading the accident report was their concern about landing overweight and spending a long time troubleshooting.

I spent a lot of time studying the Swissair Accident Report considering my incident was somewhat similar. I have often wondered if the accident where my friends who had been killed had happened before my incident would I have made a different decision about making an emergency landing at Midway. Had I gone into Midway I also wonder how many more issues that would have created.

One more thing I do remember about my incident is that I was able to stay very calm and in charge while all of this was going on. However, once we were again proceeding on to HNL my knee started shaking uncontrollably. Obviously, my mind must have suddenly realized that we had escaped a serious incident that resulted in a good ending.



My last flight as a NWA Captain flying the 747-400 from AMS to DTW on June 24, 2000. At midnight that night the FAA said I was not longer able to fly as a Captain for an American airline because I turned 60 years of age that night. It was an honor to work for NWA for 33 years and a special honor to be part of the NWA training department.

This photo was not the flight described in my story. By the way, there was a Delta 747 that made an emergency landing at Midway in 2011. You can find a video of that incident on YouTube if interested. It did not go well.

Lost my Pants.....

By Dan Lindsey



We were about 1 hour from the tod DTW-NRT. The lead enters the cockpit, oops...make that the flight deck, and explains a minor issue in the cabin. It seems that an elderly man had experienced bowel incontinence and had soiled his pants. He was extremely embarrassed and to make matters worse all his clothes were in his checked baggage.

The lead then asks "Do any of you have a pair of pants that you could give this poor old man?". Well, it was just an over and back for me and I had a pair of Dockers in my bag. So, I'm thinking, gosh this could be me in 30 years, maybe I should help this old guy out. But wait, am I really going to wear my uniform pants down to Yankee's? Since it would be dark, I could get away with that, but what about the next morning at breakfast? Oh well, I decided to help out and got my only pair of pants out of my bag. The lead was ecstatic!

About 30 minutes later she returns to inform us that the pants were a perfect fit and that the old man and his wife were so grateful.

But this is just the beginning of the story. The lead tells the rest of the cabin crew how she and the captain had saved this old man from an embarrassing predicament. Well, word of this began to spread among the flight attendants who regularly flew the Asian routes. Even a year later, while conducting a pre departure briefing to the flight attendants, one of them would say "You're the one who gave his pants to a passenger"!

Ever since that flight, the first class cheese and fruit trays as well as the dessert trays began coming to the cockpit more frequently.

I'm thinking, "That's the best \$20 donation I ever made"!



OOPS!!

Low pressure/Low altitude

The instrument pilots use to reference the plane's altitude is called an altimeter.

It is a gauge that measures barometric pressure and varies with the passage of

low and high-pressure systems. Below 18,000 feet, pilots use local altimeter readings. Above 18,000 feet, a standard setting is used, and if all the aircraft at the higher altitudes have 29.92 inches set in their altimeter's window, then vertical separation between aircraft is assured. Now for the human error side of the altimeter's story.



The last item on the climb checklist is read aloud by the engineer when passing 18,000 feet. He would say "Altimeters," and the correct pilot action is to first dial 29.92 into the altimeter's window, and then respond "29.92." But most pilots, I included, had gotten into the lazy habit by responding with just the last two numbers, or "92."

Anchorage was under the influence of a near record low pressure system. I do not recall exactly how low, but I know for a fact it fell below 28.92 (notice the 28). Let us say the local altimeter was 28.67. As we passed 18,000 feet, the engineer grabbed the checklist and called out "altimeters." Both pilots, after incorrectly dialing 28.92 into our windows, responded, "92."

For some reason, the engineer kept repeating "altimeters." And without fail, we would give the lazy pilot response of "92." The engineer would not quit. I remember thinking that maybe he was having a medical issue or could not hear. My responses increased in volume to "92!" And then "92!!" until

finally I turned and faced him. He was sporting a shit-eating grin.

“What gives?” I asked.

He passed the laminate checklist with his thumb placed under the pilots’ response passing 18,000 feet. “What does that say?” he asked. Before answering, I looked forward and spotted my error. Entering 28.92 versus the correct 29.92 would have placed us 1,000 feet below our assigned altitude.

The engineer’s attention to detail saved our bacon from a potential mishap. Later that night, he was still grinning when I insisted the beer and pizza was on me.

By John Robertson





SEA 1954



PROPOSED PLAN OF OPERATION WHILST SHEMYA IS BELOW MINIMUMS

By "Sam" Houston

Shemya weather being what it is in the summer months, it necessitates some shrewd advanced planning to keep " the old ball a rolling ".



I am sure you will be pleased to know that your committee has not been idle these last few months. We have been frantically working to offer a solution to this situation, that is practical, understandable,

operational and reasonable. After studying the following plan I'm sure you will agree that we have a practical solution to the problem.

The plan or procedures will be known as Standard Holding Instrument Tactics. Being as there will be more than one, they will be therefore known as SHIT#1, SHIT#2 etc. In order that these procedures work smoothly and effectively it is of the utmost importance that each of you familiarize himself with each detail of the program. If each knows his part well, we will be able to move rapidly and efficiently into action when the signal is "Given", and we can thereby "keep the old ball a 'rolling".

The following is the detailed plan for SHJT#1. Frank Ernst, in uniform, bags and grape juice packed, will be riding the Vashon Island Ferry.

This is the ready alert configuration that Frank will be maintaining, and he will maintain this configuration and spend the Summer riding the Ferry unless of course an Alert is sounded, and Frank has to go into action.

Carl Luethi and Jim Wainwright will be in uniform, bags packed in the ready alert configuration at Cold Bay. Joe Kimm and Al Olsen will be assigned ready alert at Shemya, while G.J. Moore will be standing by in Anchorage, at of course the "ready alert" configuration. Now everyone has their positions.

Lou Eager has been issued a police whistle. Now the second Lou determines that Shemya is going to be below minimums, he will blow the whistle. You can see that the whole program is designed for speed, as it will not be necessary to speak at all during this operation. Upon hearing Lou blow the whistle the Dispatcher shall go into action and send a message to SEA crew scheds asking what the next month's schedule will be for Dot Oetting. Pilcher upon receipt of this message shall run to the window and fire two red flares from his Very pistol in the general direction of Vashon Island. Frank Ernst seeing these shall immediately go into action.

He will come ashore at Fauntleroy dock, proceed directly to the airport and cover Max Wrights link schedule. (Max will be busy with his organ). G.J. Moore in Anchorage will without delay, start trying to trade his trip. Meanwhile, out in Cold Bay, Carl and Jim shall make the necessary arrangements to proceed directly to King Salmon. If no transportation is available, they shall start walking. On Shemya, Joe Kimm (westbound) and Al Olsen (eastbound) will trade trips to prevent building up a lot of needless excess layover pay. This trade will have to be witnessed by at least three persons of good (or better) repute.

Bellevue Jack Volkel and D.H. (southside)Robertson, will go into action in Tokyo where they will deadhead to Okinawa and standby to fly a great circle route Okinawa to Cold Bay, account Russ Laboda being high on time. Wild Bill Coty will deadhead Hong Kong to GOA where he will standby at the nerve center so that the high command may draw on his vast knowledge and experiences. Pilcher in the meantime has not been idle. Having ascertained that Frank Ernst is safely enclosed in the Link, will then proceed directly to Larry Horners desk. Start jumping up and down and screaming for a rebid. In the meantime, Carlson has called all reserve crews instructing them that a Red Alert is on and they shall report to the field in the ready alert configuration.

The Ladies Auxiliary of the "Aleutian Scrounging Society" will be notified by the direct radio teletype circuit at Mamasans. They will gather there at ASS headquarters and standby with contraceptives and hot water. Russell McKeown will be in charge of this detail and will be assisted by Robert (I know a good thing when I see it) Lee.

That about covers the first SHIT and the other will be outlined in the next "Flight Advisory Release & Timetable. Keep alert for the next FART as it may have another SHIT in it.

If there are enough requests we can conduct a special ground school to go over the highlights of the program if you wish. Attendance of course will be on a voluntary basis and pay will not be allowed.

Editors Note: Airline humor in the 1950's from the Northwest Airlines humorist.....



by Jay Sakas

Maggie was standing by the door with my hat in her right hand and a cup of coffee for the road, in her other hand. I went over to get my goodbye kiss and listen to her words of wisdom, which were the same before every trip. "Be careful out there and remember, there isn't a woman that loves you more than I love you. Fly safe." As I reached for the kiss a voice broke into my head.

"Captain Rogers, Captain Rogers wakeup." A soft voice entered my head. "Sorry to bother you," she said.

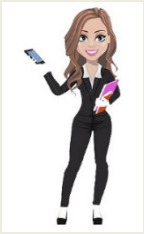
I opened my eyes into a heavenly sight. Slightly foggy was the vision, but a beautiful face.

"I'm sorry, was I snoring?" I asked sheepishly.

"No, No, though you did have a smile on your face," she said as she sat down beside me.

"I'm Molly the passenger service manager. I have good news. Someone higher up must like you; we got a message to upgrade you to first class. So here is your new boarding pass."

"Well, after 25 years of retirement it is about time, I got some recognition," I replied jokingly.



“Congratulations old timer,” she said as she stood up. “By the way, boarding will be little late. The crew has been delayed due to a serious accident on I-5.” I smiled as she walked away, even at 85, I still appreciated a good-looking lady.

I glanced around the gate area at the people milling about, and every face was blurry. Then I realized I did not have my glasses on. I looked around my seating area, but no glasses. Wondering where I might have left them, I realized that I did not remember driving to the airport. I remember standing by the door looking at Maggie’s wheelchair. I had left it there after her last trip to the hospital as a reminder of our ritual. Maggie flew West last year, and today I am all alone.

The last thing I remember was holding the coffee and imagining Maggie’s kiss. It had been our usual before-flight ritual. My uniform would be laid out. A cup of coffee on the bathroom counter waited for me when I got out of the shower. Only some hard-boiled eggs and toast for breakfast; enough to hold me till the end of the first leg. My wife and mother of four great kids would stand by the door holding my hat, plant a great kiss on me, along with her refrain, and wave as I drove off.

But today I could not remember how I got here. Lately I have been having these moments. Getting in the car to go to the store, only to find myself at the store and not remembering how I got there. But I do remember why I had to come to the airport. It was to fly to the last RNPA reunion.

Last year only twelve retired old pilots attended our annual reunion, and this year we were down to five. We were the last of the original Northwest Airlines pilots. Everyone after us were Delta.

The five of us talked throughout the year and came up with the idea of the last reunion. We decided to have it in Minneapolis, where all our careers started. Fort Snelling was still there; the memories of those days were still fresh in our minds.

For me, it was 25 years ago that I retired. The Feds changed the age rule to 65 the month before I turned 65. I had 35 great years,

We were hired at the start of the golden age of aviation, the 60s. We lived through the strikes of the 70's with Mr. Nyrop. They didn't call us the Cobra airline for nothing; never knowing when we would strike again. Then the Rothmeier tenure arrived with the Republic merger, which brought chaos and financial woes to the airline. The age of Checchi and Wilson, brought about a leverage buy-out, and threats of bankruptcy. It was followed by expansion to the Orient under Steenland and Anderson.

The merger with Delta took place after I retired; with a pension saved by ALPA, management and congress. There are some good memories of my time there. There were many friends made and lost. Finding Maggie on a flight and having four great kids was the icing on the cake. I have lived my dream.

There was a slight commotion around me and looking up I saw the crew rushing to the gate in a very somber mood. The word got out that there had been a collision between a truck and a small car. They were delayed due to the traffic jam and had to drive around the accident site. It appears that the site of the accident shook them up, or maybe it was just being delayed.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the crew has arrived, and we will be boarding in thirty minutes." Molly's voice came across on the loudspeaker. I leaned back and shut my eyes. Thinking to myself that fate has been good to me. To reach 85 and still have good health is exceptional. My family survived many years with me gone weeks at a time. Got grandkids and great grandchild on the way. Life is good, living the dream.



I must have dozed off because there was Molly's voice again calling, "we will be boarding first class and those needing assistance shortly." I stood up, and for the first time in a long time, I felt spry. I reached for my cane, but I could not find it. I did not need the cane except when my right leg got tired. I sauntered over to the line for first class. Molly was watching me line up. She approached me and asked if I need to be pre-boarded.

"Do I look like I need help? I'm in excellent health and mobility," I replied, as I tried to stand tall.

“Well Captain Rogers, it is only because you came up to the podium earlier with a cane; I don’t see the cane,” Molly sweetly replied. “But we will let you board with the pre-boards and the children. Did Molly just put me down? I just smiled back at her and said, “Thank you ma’am.” But I did not move.

After a couple minutes, she called first class and VIP members. I headed that way. Walking down the jetway I looked at my boarding pass and noted seat 2A. I dislike window seats. I spent too many years by the window, but more than that, there was a physical issue.

As I walked into first class, I noticed it was half full. That explains the upgrade. An attractive lady sat down in 2B, I stood in front of her and asked, “Excuse me, I have 2A, would you mind switching seats? My bum right leg needs to be extended.” With the sweetest smile, she responded, “I don’t mind Captain Rogers.” She picked up her purse and slid into the window seat.

“Thank you, I appreciate it. But how do you know my name,” I asked quizzically as I sat down and stretched my right leg.

“I heard the agent call your name while you were sleeping.”

“I’m Angela and it is a pleasure to meet you,” she said as she held out her hand.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Angela.” as I shook her hand.

As we settled in, she kept glancing my direction. Finally, she asked the first of many questions.

“When did you start flying?” she asked, as she turned in her seat toward me. “I bet you have some very interesting stories to tell.”

“More than enough to put you to sleep on this flight.” I said, fastening my seat belt. “But I’m an old man who will probably put himself to sleep.”

She laughed. “Well, I am a writer, specializing in aviation novels. I’ve got a couple novels under my belt,” she said as she flicked her hair. “Maybe you have read them, *Contrails*; *Mayday*.”

“No, I haven’t. But first chance I get, I’ll make a point to get them.” I replied.

I settled back in my seat and closed my eyes, hoping not to get quizzed by Angela. The next thing I knew the flight attendant was asking me what I

wanted to drink. "Ah, red wine please," I replied, and my seat mate interrupted with, "I'll have the same."

The flight attendant brought the wine, and I handed Angela her glass. Just as I took my first sip, Angela hit me with the first question. "What makes you go to Minneapolis?" She politely asked. I suspected the first of many questions.

"I'm going to a reunion for retired Northwest Airlines pilots."

She gently touched my hand and said, "I hope you don't think I'm prying; it is just the writer in me. I am working on a new novel and I am always looking for new material. I bet you have had a remarkably interesting career, and I would love to hear them all," she said and then sipped her wine.

I could tell this trip was not going to be fast enough, so I told her about the reunion hoping that would be enough. But before I realized what was happening, I was in my glory, sharing stories of the past. Her questions just kept coming. Angela had a way of pulling from me more and more stories. I enjoyed reminiscing. It was like an episode from the old TV series, "This is Your Life."

At one point, she asked if I had ever done anything that I regretted. That was when I realized that I had said too much. I excused myself and went to the bathroom.

Once I entered, I looked in the mirror and I saw an old man with a lot of miles behind him, air miles. Regrets, yes. Not proud of some my actions. There were also moments when I had to think fast, and on occasion I made a mistake. Somehow the Fates turned the mistake into a solution.

After washing up, I returned to my seat only to find Angela missing. I figured she went to the back biffy. I sat down and closed my eyes, again.

Next thing I hear, "Captain Rogers, wake up." I quickly opened my eyes and suddenly I am gazing into Angela's green eyes.

"We have landed." She softly said. "We are at the gate. Time to get off. "

"How long have I been sleeping?" I asked. "The entire flight. When I got back, you were sound asleep, and I did not want to wake you. During approach, we tried a couple of times to wake you; to put your seat-back up, but it was like trying to wake the dead."

“Are you making fun of my age?” I said as I got up out of the seat. “I’m spry for my age. As a matter of fact, I can’t believe how refreshed I feel.” As I approached the door, I noticed the entire airplane was empty. I turned toward Angela to ask what she thought of that, and she was gone. I was alone.

I looked around the airplane again, it was eerily empty. I walked out the door, started to walk up the jetway. Each step I took seemed to be better than the last one. From where I stood, I could even read the sign on the door clearly, without my glasses, having lost them. I am having a hard time understanding what is going on. I got to the doorway and pushed it open.

Suddenly, the brightest of white light hit me. I was blinded. “What the hell is going on here,” I shouted.



There was a burst of laughter, and I looked out at a crowd of people laughing and clapping their hands. Then the cheering started. Looking out at the crowd, I saw the faces of pilot friends, ones that had already flown West. There was Don, best man at my wedding and my best friend. There was Tom, Ben, Richard and all the pilots I flew with who had flown West. There were a lot more faces that I recognized but their names were blank. Off to the side of the crowd, stood my Mom and Dad. Beside them was Angela with big smile on her face. It finally dawned on me as to all those questions she had asked. She was writing my *Book of Life*.

It finally hit me. On my drive to the airport, the accident happened to me. I was driving on I-5, blacked out and ran off the road only to wake up upon the shoulder of the road. I had over steered and spun the car into the path of a truck. I was broad sided, and my car became a sardine can. I had flown West, as the string of life had been cut by the Fates.

Suddenly, Maggie is pushing her way through the crowd. She rushes up to me and grabs my shoulders. Instead of kissing me, she starts to shake me, yells into my ear.

“Wake up JJ, wake up. You are having a bad dream.”

I sat up in bed and looked at Maggie’s blue eyes. I was alive. I was not dead. Maggie was not dead!

“Hurry up and get your smart ass out of bed,” she said pulling my arm, helping me to sit up. “We have a flight to catch. You don’t want to miss the last reunion, do you?” She yelled rushing toward the bathroom. At the door she stopped, turned, and asked, “Who is Angela? You called her name a couple of times in your sleep.”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” I said, as I slowly got out of bed, and sauntered to the window. Looking out at the sunrise, I could not believe the dream I just had. It was so vivid that my shirt and shorts were sopping wet.

Turning back from the window, I looked around and realized. I am the luckiest guy in the world to be here. Made it to 75 and based on the dream, 85 looks good. I just must keep Maggie around to share it. I sighed. Whatever happens, the fates will decide. Might as well take a shower and go and enjoy this last reunion.

[The World According to Gar....](#)

Aviation’s greatest invention was the relief tube.....

Pilots - looking down on people since 1903...

Mommy, I want to grow up and be a pilot. Honey, you can’t do both.

The older I get, the better pilot I was.

There are three simple rules for making a smooth landing. Unfortunately, no pilot knows exactly what they are.

Heaven is crowded with civilian pilots who did not get their Instrument Rating.

Fate is the Huntress

By Jay Sakas

(The following story is a slightly modified reprint of a February 2017 article in Contrails)

As I sit here editing the final issue of eContrails, the question comes up “What was it that made us all arrive to this point in life?” Was it luck, divine providence, destiny or Fate?

I believe it is Fate.

After my retirement, among the many projects I undertook, one was to get back into writing. In a writing class I enrolled in, the instructor had us analyze the autobiographic writing style of Earnest K. Gann. “Fate is the Hunter” and “The High and the Mighty”, are two of his best sellers. I had read and reread them many times as a teenager. In the conclusion of ‘Fate is the Hunter,’ Ernie describes an incident which made him conclude that Fate, his and that of others, governed or controlled his and their lives. It was his last flight.

Eventually, Ernie retired to the Pacific Northwest. Judge for yourself what it was that predicted his “Last Flight.”

The following is a synopsis of the event that determined Ernie’s “Last Flight.”

“Gann was piloting a DC-4A, bound from Honolulu to Burbank. Over the course of several hours, the aircraft suffers a series of strange but not ominous vibrations. Grimes, the intelligent and attentive Flight attendant, complains of a bizarre shaking motion in the tail section. Gann and his crew investigate but eventually decide that one of the engines must be running roughly. Gann is

anxious to reach land and, contrary to common practice, does not reduce speed in the face of the uncertain vibration. Throughout the remainder of the flight Grimes continues to complain, the crew continues to inspect, and Gann continues to wonder what could be wrong—if anything. He performs a personal physical inspection of the plane, concludes it must not be serious, and flies as normal.

He lands the plane in Burbank and deplanes most of his passengers before continuing to Oakland. He is scheduled to leave the next day on a sailing vacation and, anxious to be home, causes more fuel than usual to be loaded so that he can sustain maximum speed throughout the short flight. While on the ground he is informed that another crew, also flying a DC-4A, had just been killed in a bizarre crash the day before. He flies to Oakland, lands the plane, stands around anxiously while both mechanics and engineers perform an inconclusive inspection, and then leaves for his sailing vacation.

When he returns from vacation, three weeks later, he is informed that his vibrating plane had been missing a critical bolt; the loss of the same bolt had caused the other crew to lose control and crash. Only an impossibly complicated series of events—flying at a certain speed, loading additional fuel, flying at a certain altitude—had allowed him to retain control. While the senior engineer implies that Gann has exceptional dumb luck, Gann felt it was time not to tempt fate any further. Gann reflects that men's fates vary according to unseen providence."

Fate is the Hunter by Ernest K. Gann | Summary & Study Guide © 2000-2011 BookRags, Inc.

During this study, the instructor assigned us the task of writing an autobiographical sketch of our lives and if Fate was a factor.



In Greek, Roman, and Nordic mythology, there are three fates, goddesses: One creates the thread of life, the other maintains the thread and the final fate cuts the thread of life.

Reflecting on my life, my definition of fate slightly differs from the official Webster Dictionary definition of Fate.

“The Fates are huntresses, seekers of one’s destiny, who surreptitiously infuse into it, inexplicable events, ever changing that destiny, one or more challenges at a time; all the while cackling, like the witches in Macbeth, at our folly.”

I am sure we all have stories wherein Fate infused events into our lives and changed our destiny. The following is my story.....

The Last Flight

It is midnight over the north Pacific. The darkness from outside permeates into the flight deck, softened by the glow from the instrument lights. The rhythmic throb of the four engines lulling one to sleep, as is evident by the buzzing sound coming from the guy in the right seat. I am flying a 747-400 and along with my crew and 321 souls, are racing eastward to meet the sun and then on to our destination. Looking out the windshield, the universe in all its splendor, looks down on me one last time. This is my last flight. In the past and now, I have always considered this time in flight as my cathedral. A place of reflection. The past and the future

It seems only yesterday, that 22 airline pilot wannabes were gathered in the vending area in the bowels of the green windowless Northwest Airlines General Offices. Trying to introduce ourselves and impress each other, while gawking at the new class of flight attendants walking quickly through the area. Of the twenty-two pilots only myself and another junior pilot are left. Many of the twenty have flown their last flight and some never flew that last flight but flew west instead.

I believe that the Fates are in my life. Inserting into it, inexplicable events, mischievously attimes, to push me in the direction of being here, on the last flight.

Fate decided that I be born in an insignificant country, Lithuania, during the heyday of World War 2. My mother, with me in her arms, and her family were told to flee the country by my father, to avoid living under Russian rule. The family joined other refugees and eventually made its way into Germany. My father was captured by the Russians and sent to the gulags in Siberia not to be heard from until just before his death in 1986.

My mother and her family were captured as refugees by the retreating German army. My mother having been a nurse in Lithuania, was conscripted by the German army to work at a hospital in Berlin. By Fate's design, it was in what eventually became the American sector of Berlin after the war. During the bombing of Berlin by the allies, I was placed in the hospital orphanage which had a bomb shelter. Many a night was spent in that bomb shelter, and I survived. Later, during my rebellious teen years, my mother would swear she picked up the wrong child from the orphanage.

My mother, as fate would have it, was born in the US during my grandparents' 20-year sojourn in the US. Being a natural born US citizen, she was entitled to travel to the US immediately. I was not. It took 3 years for my paperwork to arrive with permission to enter the US.

During this waiting time, we lived in many refugee camps throughout Germany. At one of those camps, an American aviator befriended my family, he gave me a small tin airplane. My destiny was set. As a child, it went everywhere with me, even to bed. It stayed with me for many years. Finally, we boarded a refugee troop carrier ship, survived a hurricane at sea and finally arrived in America in 1948 at age 5. The fates were kind to me.



Fate had us boarding the train going from New York City to Chicago, our destination. Unexplainably, my mother and I got off in Rochester, New York. I suspect she followed other refugees scheduled to get off there. Taken in by an old Lithuanian family, they cared for us, sent me to school, and helped my mother find a job. This is where we stayed.

Growing up in upstate New York, I assimilated well into the culture. Went to school and lived the life of an unadjusted teenager. My room was a hanger for model airplanes. As I grew older, I would ride my bike to the nearest airport and “thumb” for rides. Many of those rides were in “taildraggers” i.e.: Piper Cubs, Champs, (my favorite airplanes to this day). Those rides paid off. They prepared me not only for my first official flying lesson but kept me motivated to seek my private license.

After graduating from high school, off I went to college, seeking a journalism major. Spent so much time at airports and parties that I was soon asked to leave. I floundered about for a year, going to school part time while earning enough money to get that private pilot’s license. Previously, a couple of years earlier, I had an accident while riding my bike. Took the settlement money, bit the bullet and went after dream and enrolled at Spartan School of Aeronautics. Fate seemed to make sure when one earns good fortune, a little bad must precede it.

After my last check ride and during the interview with the Director of Flying for a job at Spartan as a flight instructor, the phone rang. After he answered it, he handed it to me and said, “this may work better for you” The short of it, I was hired to be a contract flight instructor for the US Air Force’s T41 program at Laredo TX. Which kept me out of the draft.

After a year and half of instructing, I ventured forth and became a vagabond. Working in any place that would hire me. In Africa working for a wild animal TV show producer flying animals around. Flight instructing, everywhere and anywhere. Becoming a freight dog, with a little crop

dusting thrown in to make life exciting.

Finally, I settled down and went back to school at the University of Dayton. Got three years of college under my belt, while still hanging around the airport and not partying. Instructing and flying any charter I could find. One day I had to fly a freighter aircrew from Dayton to Detroit for Zantop Airlines. Upon arriving, I asked operations if they needed pilots, and the next thing I knew I was hired. Zantop became Universal Airlines within a couple of weeks and as such I was in their first C-46 class at Willow Run airport.

After training and flying a dozen trips, myself and my classmates were called into a meeting. Change of plans by Universal management and we were all furloughed. After the furlough meeting, I drove over to Detroit Metro Airport, to have lunch with a Northwest Airlines ticket agent that I "knew". She handed me the pilot application and said, "fill it out and stop feeling sorry for yourself". I did as I was told.

I took the application over to the station manager, who called a person in the Personnel Department named Randy Breize (sic). The next thing I knew, I was on an Electra flight that afternoon to Minneapolis for an interview. It was a good thing I had worn a suit and tie for the furlough meeting. (A big, big thank you Randy Brieze(sic), wherever you are.) I was hired for the June 3rd class of 1968.

For the next couple of years, the Fates, seemed to have backed off. They allowed me to enjoy a somewhat normal life of an airline pilot. There were a couple of engine failures but nothing of imminent danger. Survived the usual strikes, furloughs, upgrades, check rides and numerous base transfers. Life was good, living the dream. However, early in my career, the Fates had one more inexplicable event to throw into my life.

Upon returning from a home visit and attempting to catch a flight from Chicago to Minneapolis; the flight was full. A Boeing 707 had a mechanical problem and was being ferried with crew to Minneapolis. A bunch of us non-revenue pass riders got onboard. As I entered the cabin, waiting to greet me was the most beautiful flight attendant I had ever seen. It turned out; it was her very first flight. Later, during the flight, as she came by me offering coffee, I asked her for a date in a "suave" pilot way. Where upon she politely walked away. I kept trying during the flight to entice her to go out with me; lunch, sailing on Lake Minnetonka, dinner at Fletchers. Finally, she agreed to go sailing only after I was vouched by my seat mate, a flight attendant that knew me "too" well. That and the fact that I had a new black lab puppy, seemed to close the deal. I never had a chance. Despite my roommates' warnings about my character, she felt I had possibilities and married me. Today, 30 years and four kids later, she is still looking for those possibilities. She is back there trusting me and the fates to get us safely to our destination.



Soon the hint of dawn was starting to break over the glare shield. Time to get out of my reverie and start to work one last time. I can only thank the universe or the Fates for allowing me to have reached this point in my life. I hope the fates will continue to take care of me and I promise not to tempt them (right!!).

With luck, I will set this great bird softly on the tarmac in Detroit and my career will have come full circle. I will accept the congratulations of my peers, my friends, and my family. Though I will leave with a heavy heart, I have a happiness so few can ever understand.

What the future holds for me, I do not know. I will let the fates decide.

Reflections

You know, time has a way of moving quickly and catching you unaware of the passing of years.

It seems just yesterday that I was young, just married and embarking on my new life with my mate. And yet, in a way, it seems like eons ago, and I wonder where all the years went. I know that I lived them all....

And I have glimpses of how it was back then, and of all my hopes and dreams But, here it is....the winter of my life and it catches me by surprise....

How did I get here so fast?

Where did the years go and where did my babies go?

And, where did my youth go?

I remember well.....

Seeing older people through the years and thinking that those older people were years away from me and that winter was so far off that I could not fathom it or imagine fully what it would be like.

But, here it is.....

Wife retired and she's really getting gray.....

She moves slower and I see an older woman now.

She's in better shape than me....but, I see the great change.

Not the one I married who was young and vibrant...

**But, like me, her age is beginning to show and we are now those
older folks**

that we used to see and never thought we'd be.

**Each day now, I find that just getting a shower is a real target for
the day!**

And taking a nap is not a treat anymore.....it 's mandatory!

Cause if I don 't on my own free will.....

I just fall asleep where I sit!

**And so, now I enter into this new season of my life unprepared for
all the aches and pains and the loss of strength and ability to go and do
things.**

**I know that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure
how long it will last, and when it's over.....it over!**

Yes, I have regrets.

There are things I wish I hadn't done.....

things I should have done.

But, indeed, there are many things I'm happy to have done.

It's all in a lifetime.....

So, if you 're not in your winter yet

Let me remind you.....

It will be here faster than you think!

So..... .

Whatever you would like to accomplish in your life.....

Please do it quickly!

Life goes by quickly. So.....

Do what you can today, because you can never be sure,

whether this is your winter or not!

You have no promise that you will see all the seasons of your

life.....

So, live for good today and,

Say all the things that you want your loved ones to remember.....

"life is a gift to you.

The way you live your life is your gift to those who came after.

Make it a fantastic one!"

LIVE IT WELL!!!

"author unknown"

"That's all Folks!"



BUGS BUNNY